

Filed for intro on 02/01/2001  
HOUSE BILL 251 By  
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SENATE BILL 856  
By Norris

AN ACT to provide for a pilot summer reading program for first through sixth grade students.

WHEREAS, during the summer many children lose academic skills; and

WHEREAS, without school breakfast and lunch, many children lose nutritional well-being; and

WHEREAS, many children have few structured learning opportunities; and

WHEREAS, summer learning and nutritional losses are greater for children living in rural and  
low-income communities; and

WHEREAS, children living in rural and low-income communities often fall behind during the  
summer months, starting each school year behind where they were the previous spring.

Successive summers of limited learning opportunities may cause children to fall below  
grade level by the end of elementary school, putting them further and further behind  
more privileged peers, now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. The commissioner of education is authorized to make up to four (4)  
grants, not to exceed twenty-five thousand dollars (\$25,000) for a pilot summer reading program  
for first through sixth grade students who live in counties or portions of urban areas where at  
least fifty percent (50%) of the student population receive free or reduced price school meals.

Two (2) of such grants shall be in qualifying urban areas; two shall be in qualifying rural areas. The University of Tennessee and the state board of regents systems shall be offered one urban and one rural grant each, subject to a match by the college or university which operates the program, in order to utilize and provide for evaluation a variety of techniques and methods.

SECTION 2. (a) All pilot programs shall be modeled on the “Energy Express” program in West Virginia, a six-week summer program promoting the school success of children living in rural and low-income communities across West Virginia by:

- (1) Providing summer learning experiences focused on reading;
- (2) Serving two (2) nutritious family-style meals each day;
- (3) Engaging college students in community service as mentors; and
- (4) Developing strong partnerships involving parents, schools, communities and state agencies and organizations.

(b) Preference in locating the pilot programs shall be given to areas where:

- (1) a significant percentage of children are scoring below the fiftieth (50<sup>th</sup>) percentile on achievement tests;
- (2) fifty percent (50%) or more of the children are eligible for free or reduced price meals, and
- (3) a coalition of at least five (5) community partners, including parent representation, supports the program model and generates at least thirty percent (30%) of site costs.

(c) The focus of the pilot programs shall be to immerse children in a print-rich environment, rather than employing traditional remedial reading strategies. Each day, small groups of five (5) to eight (8) children will work with college student mentors. Using a curriculum that encourages reading, mentors will guide children through experiences that make reading meaningful in their lives – creating books, reading aloud, writing and performing plays, reading

silently, keeping journals, reading one-on-one with others, and exploring the meaning of text with creative and exciting art activities.

Weekly themes of “myself”, “family”, “friends”, “homeplace”, “community”, and “ideal world” would be selected to guide activities and encourage children to appreciate themselves, their personal experiences, and their place in the world. Each week children should receive take-home books, related to the theme, to keep.

Mentors and children should share breakfast and lunch served as family-style meals. In addition to maintaining nutritional well-being, the family-style format will create opportunities for children to learn appropriate social behaviors and engage in conversation.

Children should also develop community service projects – creating books to donate to libraries, writing and recording public service announcements about reading, and reading to preschool children and senior citizens.

(d) The goal of the pilot programs is to improve the reading and learning skills of the involved children and improve their social and physical development.

SECTION 3. The participating institutions from the University of Tennessee and the state board of regents and the commissioner of education are encouraged to seek grants from the federal Americorps program as well as other available federal or private funds, and to encourage the involvement of volunteers, including the Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA).

SECTION 4. The grants under this program shall be for one (1) year, and the institutions operating the programs shall report on their operations, as requested by the commissioner. Based on these reports and the evaluation of the programs, the commissioner shall present findings and recommendations to the general assembly by February 1<sup>st</sup>, following the completion of the pilot programs.

SECTION 5. Funding for the provisions of this act shall be subject to the appropriation of funds therefor in the general appropriations act.

SECTION 6. This act shall take effect on July 1, 2001, the public welfare requiring it.